

The Cultural Landscape of a National Park

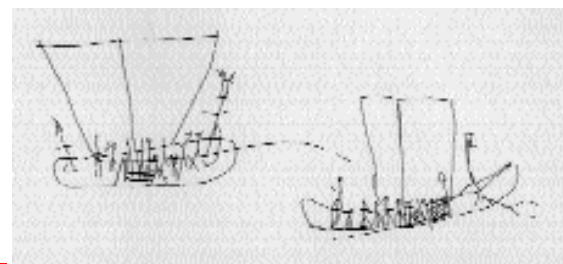
Petroglyph showing two large canoes with sails at Peter Point, Kejimikujik.

In the spring of 1995, the Minister for Canadian Heritage, Michel Dupuy, passed a recommendation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) that “the cultural landscape of Kejimikujik National Park which attests to 4,000 years of Mi’kmaq¹ occupancy of this area, and which includes petroglyph sites, habitation sites, fishing sites, hunting territories, travel routes and burials is of national historic significance...”

Established in 1964, Kejimikujik National Park in southwestern Nova Scotia protects an area of mixed forest and inland lakes which nurtures rare plant and animal species such as the Water Pennywort and Blanding’s Turtle (Drysdale, 1986). The Park also contains a unique combination of cultural resources reflecting the close connection between Mi’kmaq culture and the environment. From its beginnings, the Park has recognized the value of these cultural resources and has included interpretation of Mi’kmaq history in its public presentations.

Over fifty cultural sites are known, including four petroglyph sites, three major settlements, numerous small camps, stone eel weirs, portage routes, 19th-century family reserves and a 19th-century cemetery (Ferguson 1986). The lakes, rivers and forests have provided food, clothing, shelter, spiritual comfort and access to a broad network of travel routes connecting the Atlantic coast to the Bay of Fundy. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, they also provided economic support for a thriving guide business for hunting and fishing enthusiasts.

Declaration by the Minister of Canadian Heritage was the culmination of a two-year collaborative effort between the Mi’kmaq First Nation of Nova Scotia and Parks Canada employees. It is unique in the Canadian National Parks system in recognizing that a natural landscape of national significance



is equally of value as a cultural landscape, and that the two are inextricably linked.

The initiative to recognize Aboriginal history at Kejimikujik as a National Historic Site originated with a review of the Systems Plan for National Historic Sites (NHS). The Systems Plan (1979-81) was a strategy approved in 1981 to expand the Parks network, recognizing the need to represent more completely the diversity and complexity of Canadian culture. The NHS Systems Plan Review, (1996), emphasized the need to improve the representation of Aboriginal peoples, women and cultural communities.

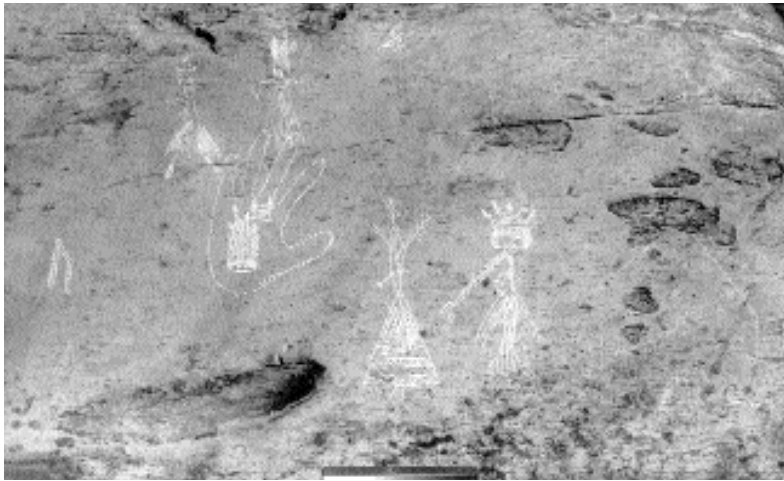
In Kejimikujik National Park, the lake shores contain some of the most significant galleries of Aboriginal art in Atlantic Canada at four separate petroglyph sites. The petroglyphs, many of them dating to the 19th century, are incised into soft slate, providing intricate details of everyday life: figures of men and women in traditional dress; canoes and sailing ships; porpoise and moose hunts; houses, churches and altars; hand and foot-prints; names and dates.

Mi’kmaq spokespersons have frequently expressed concerns for the protection of the Kejimikujik petroglyphs. During a national workshop on Aboriginal history, Dr. Peter Christmas of the Mi’kmaq Association for Cultural Studies (MACS) identified the petroglyphs as one of the important cultural resources of the Mi’kmaq First Nation. Chief Frank Meuse of Bear River First Nation stressed in two reports for Parks Canada the need for protection of Mi’kmaq cultural heritage in the park (Johnston 1993:ftn43; Sable 1992:2-8). These concerns led Parks Canada staff in the Atlantic Region to recommend the Kejimikujik petroglyph sites for commemoration by HSMBC. This recommendation required the support of the Mi’kmaq people and consultations were initiated.

Initial contact was made with the four Band Chiefs of southwest Nova Scotia, two Elders of the nearby Wildcat Reserve and Dr. Christmas of MACS. All agreed that commemoration of the petroglyphs was a positive step in recognizing the important role of the Mi’kmaq First Nation in our national heritage. A subsequent meeting, co-chaired by Dr. Christmas and myself, was convened in September 1993, bringing together Grand

Workshop delegates Alex Michael, Grand Chief Syliboy, Pauline Lewis, Daniel Paul and Rob Ferguson examine the petroglyphs at Fairy Bay. Photo by R. Swain.





Left. This petroglyph group, incised into slate bedrock at George Lake, shows Mi'kmaq men and women in the traditional costume popular in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Photo by B. Molyneux.

Chief Ben Syliboy and two Captains of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council, Chiefs and Band representatives, members of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, the Mi'kmaq Education Authority and MACS, as well as Parks Canada staff from the Park, regional office in Halifax and Ottawa headquarters.

Delegates visited the petroglyphs and stopped at the historic cemetery for a blessing from the Grand Chief. During the following discussions, Mi'kmaq participants redirected the focus beyond the petroglyph sites to a recognition of the Mi'kmaq relationship to the landscape as a whole. A committee of Mi'kmaq and Parks Canada representatives was struck to present the cultural landscape of Kejimikujik as a site for national commemoration.

The resulting report includes an account of the consultation process, the concerns raised during these consultations, and a synopsis of the continuous occupation record (Committee for the Kejimikujik Petroglyphs, 1984). Unresolved land claims, control of the story, recognition and preservation of Traditional Knowledge, protection of the cultural resources and respect for heritage resources were identified as concerns. A final draft was presented to the Nova Scotia Chiefs, and with their approval it was submitted to HSMBC in November 1994, and passed on for declaration by the Minister.

The establishment of a new National Historic Site requires an understanding of the commemorative intent and the commemorative integrity as outlined in the Cultural Resource Management Policy of Canadian Heritage (1994). As a first step, a full inventory of cultural resources is being prepared using a Geographical Information Systems mapping program. This will include all known cultural resources as well as land-use patterns identified from documented sources and recorded Traditional Knowledge. An update of cultural sites by an archaeological team of Mi'kmaq and non-Mi'kmaq

researchers was delayed this season by local concerns over the disturbance of sites, and has been restricted to a re-examination of existing information. Steps have been taken to co-operate with a land claims initiative of the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, in an oral history program. Future developments for presentation of the Aboriginal heritage in Kejimikujik will proceed with direction from the Mi'kmaq community.

The concept of the "cultural landscape" in so-called natural environments is gaining currency in our vision of the land around us (see, for example, Zacharias 1994). Kejimikujik National Park/National Historic Site allows us to celebrate this wonderful union while honouring the outstanding contribution of the Mi'kmaq people to our nation's heritage.

Note

- ¹ The spelling of *Mi'kmaq* uses the Francis/Smith orthography developed by Bernard Francis and Douglas Smith and widely accepted throughout Nova Scotia (Francis 1988:239)

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